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Prime Minister's schedule, July 6-7

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)

July 8, 2009

July 6

Late at night Arrived at Leonardo da Vinci International Airport via special JAL airplane.

July 7

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Before dawn Stayed at Hotel De Russie in Roma.

Afternoon Met with Pope Benedict XVI and State Secretary of the Vatican Bertoni.

4) Japan, U.S. to hold first nuclear-umbrella talks later this month to confirm its operation in contingency

YOMIURI (Top play) (Abridged)

July 8, 2009

Keiko Iizuka, Washington

The governments of Japan and the United States reached an agreement on July 7 to set up official talks on the U.S.' nuclear umbrella and began scheduling the first session for later this month, according to sources close to both governments. The governments plan to hold the talks at the level of deputy directors and vice ministers of the Japanese foreign and defense ministries and the U.S. state and defense departments. At the talks, Japan will be briefed by the U.S. side on how nuclear arms will be used in a contingency. The two sides will then discuss, among other matters, consistency between U.S. President Barack Obama's large-scale nuclear arms-reduction plan and a nuclear deterrent.

Under the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, the U.S. nuclear umbrella is designed to protect Japan from a nuclear attack by a third country with nuclear weapons possessed by the United States. The United States shares the operation of and information on nuclear weapons in emergency situations with members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) which has a similar system.

In Japan, the only country to have suffered atomic bombings, a strong antipathy toward nuclear arms prevails among the public. If the government holds talks on the operation of nuclear weapons, strong reactions from the opposition parties and others are expected. At the same time, the United States has been highly alarmed at a possible leakage of confidential military information from the Japanese side. As such, the matter has rarely been discussed between Japan and the United States.

However, North Korea conducted its second nuclear test in May, while China has been modernizing its nuclear capability, making East Asia's security environment increasingly volatile. Given the situation, some in the government have called for a reaffirmation of the role of the nuclear umbrella and have said that Japan needs to be briefed by the United States on how that will be operated specifically.

In April, President Obama announced that his administration will aim at a world without nuclear weapons. In their talks on July 6, President Obama also agreed with his Russian counterpart to conclude a new pact replacing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START 1), which is designed to reduce the number of deployed nuclear warheads up to 1,500.

The new agreement is expected to be reflected in the Nuclear Posture

Review (NPR), which will be compiled by the Obama administration in December, becoming the third such review in U.S. history.

5) Japan-U.S. to hold official talks on nuclear umbrella at Japan's call to apply pressure on North Korea

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YOMIURI (Page 2) (Abridged slightly)  
July 8, 2009

Keiko Iizuka, Washington

The Japanese and U.S. governments have begun considering holding their first official talks on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. This is based on Japan's request for the confirmation of the dependability of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, given progress in North Korea's nuclear development. The planned talks are also designed to apply pressure on North Korea and other countries by demonstrating externally the two countries' firm relations of trust regarding nuclear deterrence.

Given the United States' nuclear disarmament plan and its aging nuclear warheads, Japan is concerned whether the nuclear umbrella will really function in the event of a contingency.

With China reportedly possessing some 200 nuclear warheads, Japan's foreign and defense ministries fear the possibility of China's nuclear capability growing to the level of that of the United States in the long run depending on how the U.S. proceed with its nuclear disarmament plan. The United States has not conducted nuclear tests as it voluntarily put a freeze on such tests in 1992. This has resulted in growing concerns in the United States about aging nuclear warheads and a decline in the technology handling nuclear weapons. At the talks, Japan intends to be briefed on those points as well.

At the same time, there is a sense of alarm in the United States centering on conservative legislators and experts that if the U.S. fails to present a dependable nuclear umbrella, Japan and South Korea might arm themselves with nuclear weapons to counter North Korea. This can explain why Washington has decided to respond positively to Tokyo's request.

But in order to hold bilateral talks, Japan needs to overcome many challenges. For instance, the question of nuclear capability has rarely been discussed in the Japanese political scene due partly to a strong public "nuclear allergy." Even after the Obama administration announced a plan in April to aim at a nuclear-free world, full-fledged discussions on the nuclear umbrella have been absent from the Liberal Democratic Party subcommittee on the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) to be revised by the government at the end of the year.

Defense secrets have often leaked out of Japan in the past. The U.S. side is highly concerned about sharing top-secret information on nuclear weapons with Japan. Japan needs to swiftly study ways to wipe away such concerns.

The Japanese government and ruling and opposition lawmakers should find a means to promote further the global move to eliminate nuclear weapons by looking squarely at the realities of nuclear strategies and conducting active discussions.

6) Ex-ambassador to U.S. Okawara reveals that Tanaka cabinet in 1974 mulled revising three non-nuclear principles to allow port calls by warships carrying nuclear arms

MAINICHI (Top play) (Full)  
July 8, 2009

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Takashi Sudo

It has been learned that the Japanese government had considered a virtual revision to one of the three non-nuclear principles of "not introducing" nuclear arms to officially allow port calls by ships carrying nuclear arms at the time of (then) President Gerald Ford's visit to Japan in 1974. This was revealed to Mainichi Shimbun by former ambassador to the U.S. Yoshio Okawara, 90, who at the time became the chief of the minister's secretariat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) from his previous position of director general of the American Affairs Bureau. A secret agreement on port calls by ships carrying nuclear weapons was concluded at the time of negotiations on revisions to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in 1960. It is believed that this move was contemplated in 1974 in order to scrap the secret agreement and make the nuclear umbrella explicit, using the occasion of the first visit to Japan by an incumbent U.S. president.

According to Okawara, shortly before Ford's visit in the fall of 1974, a handful of top MOFA officials, including the late Foreign Minister Toshio Kimura of the Kakuei Tanaka cabinet, the late Parliamentary Vice Foreign Minister Fumihiko Togo, and Okawara, met. Kimura said at the meeting that, "It is absurd for Japan, which is protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella, not to allow port calls (by ships carrying nuclear arms)." He instructed the MOFA officials to study a plan to interpret "non-introduction" in the three non-nuclear principles as referring to introduction on land, and port calls would not be considered "introduction."

Kimura said that, "I have asked the prime minister (about revising the interpretation) and he said: 'Okay. Let's do it (do the revision)," telling the group that Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka had given his consent. However, on November 26, right after Ford's visit, Tanaka resigned to take responsibility for a money scandal and other issues, and the Takeo Miki cabinet was inaugurated on December 9. Kiichi Miyazawa took over from Kimura as foreign minister and the plan to revise the three non-nuclear principles fizzled out.

The government's official position is that even port calls are included in the provision on not introducing nuclear weapons, and "unless the U.S. side requests prior consultation, nuclear arms cannot be brought into Japan." However, retired Rear Admiral Gene LaRoque revealed in September 1974 that "U.S. ships carrying nuclear weapons made port calls in Japan." Meanwhile, the U.S. aircraft carrier Midway was based in Yokosuka at that time. If this issue became controversial during the U.S. president's visit, it could throw the Japan-U.S. relationship into confusion. It is believed the meeting of the top MOFA officials was held in this context.

7) "Commentary": Three non-nuclear principles built on secret agreement; contradiction in dependence on the U.S. persists today

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)  
July 8, 2009

Takashi Sudo

The Japanese government's giving consideration to revising the three non-nuclear principles in 1974 can be said to be an attempt to eliminate as much as possible the anomaly in Japan-U.S. relations,

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symbolized by the secret agreement (on ports calls by ships carrying nuclear arms), after the reversion of Okinawa to Japan (in 1972), which was a major postwar bilateral issue. This was an important juncture in the bilateral relationship, coming at the time of the first visit by an incumbent U.S. president.

(Then) Foreign Minister Toshio Kimura probably suggested the revision of the three non-nuclear principles to (then) Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka in fall 1974 and discussed this vigorously with top Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) officials because he took seriously the impact of the statement of retire Rear Admiral Gene LaRoque on "bringing in nuclear arms."

Kimura revealed his serious dilemma in a statement to the Diet in

October 1974: "We need to maintain the people's position on the three non-nuclear principles while also show understanding to the requirement of U.S. defense secrets of not revealing the existence or non-existence of nuclear weapons. That is where the problem is." Thirty-five years after that, the Japanese government today still repeats its official position that, "Inasmuch as there has not been any request from the United States, nuclear arms have not been brought into the country." This is nothing but a self-protection tactic - "if nuclear arms are found, the U.S. is to blame."

On the other hand, Japan's security has depended on the U.S. "nuclear umbrella" built on such things as port calls by ships carrying nuclear arms. A former MOFA official who once served as the director of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty Division points out that, "Japan is beholden to the U.S. with regard to the introduction of nuclear arms." A former parliamentary vice foreign minister admits the existence of a secret agreement and states bitterly: "The United States has gone along with Japan's slipshod handling of this matter. This worked only because it was the Cold War era."

The contradiction between the reality of the U.S. "nuclear umbrella" and Japan's position as the only atomic-bombed nation, as symbolized by the three non-nuclear principles, has led to the ambiguity of the secret agreement, thus resulting in the lack of transparency in the bilateral relationship. This situation has remained unchanged until today.

U.S. President Barack Obama is calling for a "world without nuclear weapons" and is promoting a new nuclear policy. However, Japan, which is being threatened by North Korea's nuclear tests, is not in a position to give up the U.S. "nuclear umbrella" right away. Nevertheless, unless the Japanese government faces squarely the basic contradiction in its nuclear policy, the lack of transparency in the Japan-U.S. relationship will only be exacerbated.

#### 8) Cargo inspection bill gets cabinet approval

SANKEI (Page 5) (Abridged)  
July 8, 2009

The government, in an ad hoc cabinet meeting held yesterday evening, adopted a special legislative measure allowing Japan to inspect the cargo of ships heading to and from North Korea and presented the legislation to the House of Representatives. In the wake of North Korea's second nuclear test, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution to inspect nuclear- and missile-related materials. The Japan Coast Guard is to conduct cargo inspections at sea. The government and the ruling parties will start Diet

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deliberations tomorrow on the cargo inspection bill in an aim to enact it at the current Diet session.

The Self-Defense Forces' role is to be limited to such activities as tracking ships and gathering intelligence. In addition, the SDF is also to guard JCG patrol ships conducting cargo inspections at sea.

Concerning maritime security operations to be invoked under the Self-Defense Forces Law, the cargo inspection bill only stipulates that the government will take security and other necessary measures at sea. It precludes the SDF from conducting cargo inspections.

Cargo inspections are to be conducted for vessels and planes suspected of carrying contraband. The JCG will conduct cargo inspections in international waters and Japan's territorial waters. Customs will inspect cargoes at seaports and airports. If cargo prohibited by the UNSC resolution is discovered in inspections, the captain will be ordered to hand it over, and the cargo will be stored. Biochemical weapons will be abandoned at once. In addition, items that cannot be stored will be sold, and the money will be returned.

#### Main points from cargo inspection bill

-- The legislation purports to remove the threat resulting from North Korea's nuclear testing, etc. Cargo inspection authority is

invested in the JCG commandant and the customs superintendent.

-- Ships are to be inspected with their captains' consent if there is good reason to acknowledge that they are loaded with specific cargo bound for North Korea in violation of the U.N. resolution. If cargo is confirmed to be in violation of the U.N. resolution, the captain will be ordered to hand it over. This cargo will be stored. If there is reason for ships to refuse cargo inspections, they will be brought to a designated seaport.

-- In case Japan refuses foreign authorities' inspection of a Japanese ship in international waters, the government will order that ship to be brought to a Japanese or foreign port.

-- Cargo inspections in international waters and the abovementioned orders require the flag state's consent.

-- In conformity with what is stipulated in the Defense Ministry Establishment Law, the Self-Defense Forces Law, and other relevant laws, the SDF will take security and other necessary actions at sea in special cases where the JCG alone cannot handle inspections or other measures.

#### 9) Defense chief visits Okinawa

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
July 8, 2009

Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada yesterday departed for his first official visit to Okinawa. Hamada will visit the island of Yonagunijima today to exchange views with Yonaguni Town Mayor Shukichi Hokama about basing Ground Self-Defense Force troops on the island. Hamada will also meet with Nago City Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro. He will meet with Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima tomorrow to discuss the issue of relocating the U.S. military's Futenma airfield and other issues.

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#### 10) MSDF will be mobilized only under special circumstances in bill presented to the Diet allowing cargo searches

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Excerpt)  
July 8, 2009

The government on July 7 convened a special meeting of the National Security Council and the Cabinet and approved a special measures bill for cargo inspections of ships coming in and out of North Korea. It then presented the bill to the Diet. The bill enables Japan to implement a United Nations Security Council resolution against North Korea for carrying out a nuclear weapons test. The government in order to closely cooperate with the international community, including the United States and South Korea, aims at the bill's early passage. In order to make it easy to obtain the cooperation of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), ship searches will be the main responsibility of the Japan Coast Guard, with the Maritime Self-Defense Force having limited involvement. The focus now will be on the response of the DPJ, but with fierce maneuvering now going on between the ruling and opposition camps, going into the next Lower House election, the situation has an aspect of fluidity.

#### 11) Diet dissolution a barrier to cargo inspection bill

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
July 8, 2009

The government yesterday submitted a bill to the Diet for a special measures law to inspect cargo onboard ships heading to and from North Korea. The ruling parties are going to enact the special legislation at the current Diet session. The Diet is set to close its current session on July 28. The question is whether the bill can be enacted during the current Diet session. It depends on when the prime minister will dissolve the House of Representatives. Another key factor to its enactment is how the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) will respond.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura, meeting the press yesterday, played up the legislation's importance. "It has international significance," Kawamura said.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874, adopted in the wake of North Korea's nuclear test, is intended to block North Korea from developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. To that end, the UNSC resolution embargoes relevant materials. In order to heighten its effectiveness, the resolution calls on U.N. member nations to implement cargo inspections. The legislation is the basis for Japan's implementation of cargo inspections.

North Korean ships, however, cannot be expected to comply with Japan's cargo inspections. Given this, the legislation's actual efficacy cannot be expected. The bill does not stipulate cooperation with U.S. forces or other foreign naval ships. This legislation is rather meant to "clearly show that Japan is more proactive than any other country in its efforts to carry out cargo inspections," according to Taku Yamasaki, chairman of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's Research Commission on Foreign Affairs.

The government and the ruling parties are aiming to start Diet deliberations tomorrow on the cargo inspection bill in the House of

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Representatives. Their scenario is to pass the bill in the House of Representatives on July 14 and enact it into law in late July. But there is little time to deliberate on the bill. Moreover, if Prime Minister Aso dissolves the House of Representatives right after the July 12 Tokyo metropolitan election, the bill will die stillborn. Given such circumstances, even ruling party lawmakers are not so enthusiastic about enacting the legislation. One mid-ranking lawmaker in the LDP deems it "impossible" for the bill to get through the Diet during the current session.

Meanwhile, the DPJ's response is another key factor to the question of whether the cargo inspection bill can be enacted into law during the current Diet session. The bill says the Japan Coast Guard and customs are to conduct cargo inspections. The Self-Defense Forces' involvement is within the bounds of the current law. If that is the case, the DPJ will likely accept the legislation. "If the Japan Coast Guard is mainly in charge of cargo inspections, then I can agree to the bill," one of the DPJ's lawmakers said.

DPJ President Hatoyama also said in a press conference yesterday: "If they say the Maritime Self-Defense Force is likely (to be mobilized) only in a special case, then I feel we should not be in a position to oppose the legislation." With this, Hatoyama also implied his party's intention to vote for the bill. The DPJ will hold a meeting of its foreign affairs and defense division tomorrow to decide on its response.

12) Prime Minister Aso meets with the Pope

SANKEI (Page 2) (Abridged slightly)  
July 8, 2009

Morimichi Imahori, Rome

After arriving in Rome on a special JAL airplane before dawn on July 7 (on the morning of July 7, Japan time), Prime Minister Taro Aso met at noon with Pope Benedict XVI, 82, at the Vatican Palace.

The meeting was realized at the request of Aso. It was the first meeting between a Japanese prime minister and the Pope in ten years. The previous one was held in 1999 between Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and Pope John Paul II.

Aso explained that his grandfather, former Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, was the first Japanese prime minister to have met with the Pope. He told the Pope:

"I'm really honored to meet you. Japan would like to cooperate with the Vatican, which has carried out its own diplomacy backed by 1.1 billion Catholics, to stabilize international situations, as well as

to resolve problems common to all humankind."

The Pope then said that he was glad to hold a meeting with Aso, who is a Catholic. He also said: "I'm pleased that Japan is open to all religions." With his visit to Africa in March in mind, the Pope expressed his hopes for Japan's support for Africa.

13) Russian Upper House adopts statement demanding suspension of visa-free exchange program on Northern Territories

SANKEI (Page 1) (Full)  
July 8, 2009

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Takao Sato, Moscow

The Russia Federation Council adopted on July 7 a statement asking President Dmitriy Medvedev to suspend the "visa-free exchange program" under which residents of Japan and the Northern Islands can exchange visits without passports and visas. This is in protest to the Japanese Diet's passage of an amendment to the special measures law for the promotion of a solution to the Northern Territories issue, stating that these islands are an "integral part of Japanese territory."

Russian presidential assistant Arkady Dvorkovich also expressed concern on the same day that "the environment is not necessarily favorable" for the Japan-Russia summit to be held on the sidelines of the G-8 L'Aquila Summit.

The Russian Upper House's statement criticizes the amended Japanese law as "contradicting the direction of the dialogue between Russia and Japan to find a mutually acceptable solution on the question of the peace treaty."

The visa-free exchange program has been in effect from 1992 under an agreement between the two governments. A Japanese delegation has just left Nemuro on July 6. The Kuril district government of Sakhalin Province, which exercises administrative control on Etorofu, one of the four Northern Islands, announced its rejection of the visa-free program on July 7, but according to reports from Vladivostok in the Far East, the representative office of the Foreign Ministry in the province says that the Japanese delegation "will be received as planned."

14) Key bills to determine timing of Lower House dissolution

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)  
July 7, 2009

The timing for Lower House dissolution still remains unclear. Key bills that have been left for later discussions are impinging on the specification of such timing.

Prime Minister Taro Aso at a Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) executive meeting held before his departure to Italy to attend the G-8 summit said, "I want you to take care of Diet deliberations on the remaining key bills." He specifically mentioned a bill amending the Organ Transplant Law and a cargo inspection special measures bill on the inspection of vessels heading to and from North Korea.

Due in part to growing public interest in the matter, the prevalent view on the bill amending the Organ Transplant Law is that dissolving the Lower House before a vote on the bill by the Upper House will draw criticism, as a senior LDP member put it. The Upper House Health, Labor and Welfare Committee is now deliberating on the bill. They are discussing Plan-A, which has cleared the Lower House, and its counter plan. A plan revising Plan-A was submitted on July 17.

The ruling parties' stance is that the bill should be put to a vote at an Upper House plenary session. However, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is reluctant to do so. A roll call for the bill will likely take place next week or later after the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election.

Concerning the cargo inspection special measures bill, submitted to the Diet on July 7, the ruling camp aims to enter deliberations after giving an explanation of it at a Lower House plenary session on July 9, and pass it through the Lower House before the end of next week. However, the prospects for its passage depend on the move of the DPJ, which will for the first time confer on its approach to the bill on July 9.

If these two bills secure Diet approval, the barriers for Lower House dissolution will be removed for the time being. The prime minister, however, did not clearly order the enactment of the two bills. Since forces opposing Lower House dissolution at an early date are insisting on the enactment of the bills as a reason for their call for putting off Lower House dissolution, making the situation complicated.

A special measures bill to provide relief for unrecognized Minamata disease patients, another key bill, is expected to be approved and enacted at a plenary session of the Upper House on July 8.

Explanations on the government-sponsored bills related to the reform of the national government employee system featuring the establishment of a cabinet personnel bureau will be given at the Lower House Cabinet Committee on July 8. However, there are no prospects for them securing Diet approval.

15) Hatoyama false fund entry issue: He explains that different organization pays expenses

SANKEI (Page 5) (Abridged slightly)  
July 8, 2009

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has some doubts about the fact that a political organization named the Hatoyama Yukio Kouenkai Rengo (Federation of Hatoyama Yukio Support Organizations) of Muroran, Hokkaido, reported "zero yen" as its operating expenses in its financial reports for 2005-2007. Touching on this fact, Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Yukio Hatoyama reported to party executives and executive board meetings yesterday that another political organization called the Hokkaido Yuai Seikei Konwakai (Hokkaido Fraternal Politics and Economics Discussion Council), which shares the same office, pays the rent, telephone bill, and other expenses. His reports were approved.

At a press conference yesterday, Hatoyama made the following comment regarding his response to the question of false entries in his political funds reports: "If the LDP is attacking me to generate a suspicious image, I think I need a venue of some sorts (to offer a counter argument)."

At the same time, Hatoyama apparently does not intend to attend a session of the Deliberative Council on Political Ethics. Many DPJ executives have cautious views, with one saying, "He should not show up at an arena prepared by the LDP."

The LDP is suspecting that funds from Hatoyama's mother have illegally flown out in a form of evading inheritance taxes. About such an allegation, Hatoyama said: "I have +donations. That has nothing to do with inheritance taxes."

16) Scope column: LDP desperately trying to attack DPJ President

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Hatoyama, aiming at tarnishing his image

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
July 8, 2009

Shunsuke Shimizu

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) yesterday came up with

measures to pursue Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Yukio Hatoyama over the illegal individual donation scandal. The LDP plans to demand that Hatoyama be called to testify before the Diet as an unsworn witness. With the July 12 Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election and a general election for the House of Representatives approaching, the LDP has yet to find any good measures to regain party strength. Therefore, the party is now desperate to pursue Hatoyama, considering it the only means of attacking the DPJ.

"There are a lot of questions that we want to ask him. I would like him to answer them at the Diet," Yoshitaka Murata, chief deputy chairman of the LDP Diet Affairs Committee, told reporters yesterday at the Diet building.

The LDP decided in a meeting yesterday of senior directors of the Diet Affairs Committee that it aims to adopt a resolution calling for Hatoyama's testimony on July 10 at a session of the Lower House Special Committee on Political Ethics and Revision of the Public Offices Election Law. At the same time in a meeting of the chief directors of the ruling parties from the Lower House Budget Committee, participants demanded that intensive deliberations on the issue of "politics and money" be held on July 15. In addition, an LDP director of the Upper House Committee on Basic National Policies proposed to a DPJ committee director that a debate between Prime Minister Taro Aso and DPJ President Hatoyama be held on July 15.

However, the DPJ is unlikely to accept both requests readily.

The New Komeito, the LDP's junior coalition partner, has taken a positive stance toward Diet testimony by Hatoyama, but it has not budged from following the practice of "unanimous action as a condition." The reason is because the DPJ has hinted that it will call for Diet testimony by former New Komeito Chairman Junya Yano, who has filed a damages suit against the Soka Gakkai, the New Komeito's chief supporter, if the ruling camp goes ahead with Hatoyama's testimony. The DPJ has warned that it will call for testimony by Finance Minister Kaoru Yosano and Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshihiro Nikai, whose political donation problems have been called to attention.

17) Higashikokubaru puts off decision on whether to run in Lower House election

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
July 8, 2009

Miyazaki Gov. Hideo Higashikokubaru met yesterday with Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Election Strategy Council Chairman Makoto Koga and Deputy Chairman Yoshihide Suga at party headquarters. The three exchanged views on the possibility of Higashikokubaru running in the next House of Representatives election. Regarding the popular governor's two proposals as conditions for his candidacy - (1) the LDP listing him as candidate for party president; and (2) inclusion of the National Governors' Association's demand for decentralization

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in the party's manifesto (campaign pledges) for the Lower House election, the LDP side said: "The party is considering them in a positive manner." Higashikokubaru showed his appreciation of the LDP's position, but refrained from making a decision yesterday.

Higashikokubaru told reporters after the meeting: "The LDP's policy is that it will formulate a manifesto after the Lower House is dissolved. I'm not in a hurry, anyway." With regard to the decentralization issue, he said: "It is a major hurdle for the LDP. It will be difficult to reach consensus in the party." He indicated that he would make a final decision on whether to run or not after seeing the contents of the LDP's manifesto after Lower House dissolution.

ZUMWALT